

EDITORIAL

## INVERTED MONASTERIES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE student of history—who reads the Little Land League tract, holding out the prospect of spiritual, mental and physical well being on two acres of land, and issued under the auspices of Bolton Hall, E.R.A. Seligman, Seth Low, Philemon Tecaum Sherman, J.P. Pierpont Morgan {sic} eighteen other godfathers of the National Organization for the Promotion of Living on and from the Little Land—could hardly help seeing, rising before his mind's, as he reads, the picture of society when medieval monasticism sprang up and indeed, flourished. And, as the picture gathers vividness and stands out in all its fulness—by that time the reader will have reached the end of the tract—then, if he be at all familiar with English literature, upon his memory are sure to force themselves the Shakespearean lines—

How many things by season season'd  
are.  
To their right praise and true perfection!<sup>1</sup>

—and *vice versa*.

The monastery sprang up in the darkness of the Middle Ages. Had it depended upon religious conviction only, there had been few of them, and these few would have been shriveling specimens. Instead, the monasteries cropped up in gigantic numbers; still more gigantic was the number of those who flocked, supported and inhabited them; and mammoth was the wealth and comfort gathered within their precincts. With exceptions that only prove the rule, the monastery was not sought as a living grave but as a living paradise. Such were the economic and social conditions of the times that the large number of those, whose temperament, or other

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<sup>1</sup> [William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*.]

qualities, rendered unfit to cope with the existing turmoil, fled to the monastery as a place of refuge from the rowdy-dow without. The monastery was an oasis, surrounded by a mind and body-wracking desert, and insuring spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing. The monastery was a device by season seasoned to its right praise and true perfection.

Times have changed, and we have changed with them. Large production to-day renders the life of the small producer a long and prolonged, usually subdued, at intervals high pitched wail. Man is a gregarious animal—or angel, if that taste better. The torture of the small producer in town or city is somewhat soothed by contact with the crowd. The torture of the small producer on farm is unalleviated; it is accentuated by solitude.

The economic, combined with the psychic causes, turn the two-acre man into a Yahoo. The sketches of New England inner life by the New England writer Mary Wilkins Freeman afford many a stray peep into the home of the two-acre family.

Unable to compete with the larger farmer; subject, without appeal, to what may be termed the *corvée* imposed upon a him by what may be styled the modern feudality of the Transportation Companies;—thus strapped and then of whaled, the two-acre family sinks to that economic depth where an extreme of agriculture has begun to meet an extreme of industry. Monumental is the economic fact, brought out by city factory inspectors on the war path against the sweating system, that as fast as it is driven from the city, the sweating system enters as a skeleton into the closets of the rural districts.

Nor is that all. As already indicated, with the small agriculturalist the measure of misery ends not with economic trials. It is surfilled {sic} with psychic woe—a psychic woe the depth of which marks the length of the road the race has traveled since the pastoral days, when solitude uplifted by promoting contemplation. Equally monumental is the psychic fact that there is more insanity to the square inch on the two acre field than in the congested city.

The two acre expedient is the old monastery inverted. It is a barren exile's island that insures physical, mental and spiritual atrophy. Economic and social conditions, together with the atmosphere they create, season the expedient unseasonable, to its just condemnation and utter imperfection.

FLIGHT was the slogan in season during the Middle Ages; the slogan in season to-day is AGGRESSION.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded July 2010

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